11:Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1957 OC6 Iban OC6

rituals—which was how we had come to know her. When we told her that we would very much like to learn something about the Iban way of making earthenware pots she said she would be glad to help us, and she agreed that the next day we should follow the making of a pot from the gathering of the clay onwards.

In 1949, Runin was a widow of about 65 years. She had been born in a long-house of the Sungai Ngemah, to which river her ancestors had migrated from the headwaters of the Batang Ai, and she had been living in the Sungai Tiau since about 1923, a year after the Baleh region was re-opened to settlement following the quelling of Iban rebels in the Rejang, the Mujong and the Gat.[5] At 65, Runin stood at the head of a *bilek* family of seven members. Her greatest delight in life was Tukang, aged 3, her grandson.[6] Tukang was the son of Demai (aged 25 years) the daughter of Runin's deceased sister Payah, and Demai it was who was deputed by Runin to go, the next day, and collect the clay for the making of further pots. Demai called in, as a helper, Inyan, aged 14 years, the granddaughter of Runin's sister-in-law, Irin, who lived in a neighbouring apartment of the long-house.

Soon after ten o'clock the next morning (26th November, 1949), Demai and Inyan came to tell us that they were ready to go and dig for clay. They had with them two long-bladed knives (*duku*) and two circular baskets (*lekit*) lined with freshly plucked banana leaves (*daun pisang*). The spot where Demai hoped to find suitable clay was on the western bank of the Tiau River just opposite the long-house. Other women of the long-house, she said, had made pots with clay from this source, but never Runin, who usually obtained her supplies from deposits further inland, now cut off by the flooded river.

Because the Tiau was in flood we had to make the crossing to the western bank by canoe (*prau*). Within a few minutes Demai had located a narrow seam of clay just above the level of the swollen river. After testing a piece of the clay by pressing it between her fingers she announced that it would do, and after an admonitary word to Inyan and ourselves she commenced to dig. (Plate 1).*

Her admonition was a strange one. Before setting out from the long-house Demai had solemnly warned us of a taboo (*pemali*)

*Plate numbers referred to by Dr. Freeman are cross-indexed to S.M.J. sequence at p.174, q.v.

2. Value of New Land

Implicit in the population pressures was a second factor, the obverse of the first, the Iban cultural value of new land. The Ibans are themost expansive and aggressive of the indigenous peoples of Sarawak. The institution of pejalai included, among other purposes such as the validation of the Iban male, the reconnitering of new lands and other people. In one account,[11] two brothers, Baji and Tagi', sons of Baring, on a pejalai from the Skrang, made a bark canoe (utap),[12] and travelled down the Kanowit. Coming out onto the broad expanse of the Rajang, they were astounded to find how flat the land was. They travelled as far as Bukit Lan below Sibu, then returned to bring their families to the land just waiting for the taking.

3. The Pioneer

A third factor, related to the migrations and high value of new land in Iban culture, was the traditional class system. More will be said of this ina a later chapter, but contrary to what Freeman has written about the Ibans of the Sut, the Ibans in the Sibu District had a well-developed class consciousness, which still obtains among them, particularly in the arrangement of marriages. During the nineteenth century, the pioneer (ke mubok menoa baru, "who opens up new land")

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[11] Interview with Tuai Rumah Ampan, 16 November, 1970.

[12] Such craft are still occasionally made for trips from headwaters, and abandoned after a single trip.